1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

young are comely, of a buxom type, and, like the men, with highly-developed calves, the latter always being considered a beauty. The children are frequently remarkably pretty. Khasis carry very heavy burdens, it being the custom for the coolies of the country to carry a maund, or 82 lbs. weight, or even more occasionally, on his back, the load being fixed by means of a cane band which is worn across the forehead; women carry almost as heavy loads as the men. The coolies, both male and female, commonly do the journey between Cherrapunji and Shillong, or between Shillong and Jowai, in one day, carrying the heavy loads above mentioned. Each of the above journeys is some thirty miles. They carry their great loads of rice and salt from Therria to Cherrapunji, an ascent of about 4,000 feet in some three to four miles, in the day. The Khasis are probably the best porters in the north of India, and have frequently been requisitioned for transport purposes on military expeditions.

The people are cheerful in disposition, and are light-hearted by nature, and, unlike the plains people, seem to thoroughly appreciate a joke. It is pleasant to hear on the road down to Theriaghat from Cherrapunji, in the early morning the whole hillside resounding with the songs of song and peals of laughter of the coolies, as they run nimbly down the short cuts on their way to market. The women are specially cheerful, and pass the time of day and handy jokes with passers-by with quite an absence of reserve. The Khasis are certainly more industrious than the Assamese, are generally good-tempered, but are occasionally prone to sudden outbursts of anger, accompanied by violence. They are fond of music, and rapidly learn the hymn tunes which are taught them by the Welsh missionaries. Khasis are devoted to their offspring, and the women make excellent nurses for European children, frequently becoming much attached to their little charges. The people, like the Japanese, are fond of nature. A Khasi loves a day out in the woods, where he thoroughly enjoys himself. If he does not go out shooting or fishing, he is content to sit still and contemplate nature. He has a separate name for each of the commoner birds and flowers. He also has names for many butterflies and moths. These are traits which are not found usually in the people of India.

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

the egg in the eyes of Palaung is demonstrated, and we know how the Khasi regards it. But the folk-tale is also important as suggesting that the ancient people of Pagan were originally serpent-worshippers, i.e. *Nāgās*, and it is interesting to note that the Rumai or Palaung women of the present day "wear a dress which is like the skin of the Naga (snake)." Is it possible that the Khasi superstition of the *thlen*, or serpent demon, and its worship, an account of which will be found under the heading of "Human Sacrifices" in the Monograph, has anything to do with the ancient snake-worship of the people of Pagan, and also of the ancient inhabitants of Naga-Dwipa, and that amongst the wild Wa the custom of head-hunting may have taken the place of the Khasi human sacrifices to the *thlen*?

Notwithstanding that Sir George Scott says the story has very Burman characteristics, the Palaung folk-tale is further interesting in that it speaks of the Sawbwa of the Palaungs being descended from a *princess*. This might be a suggestion of the matriarchate.

It can well be imagined how important a matter it is also, in the light of Grierson's and Kuhn's linguistic conclusions, to ascertain whether any of the Mon-Khmêr people in Anam and Cambodia and neighbouring countries possess social customs in common with the Khasis. In case it may be possible for French and Siamese ethnologists in Further India to follow up these inquiries at some subsequent date, it may be stated that information regarding social customs is required with reference to the people who speak the following languages in Anam and Cambodia and Cochin China which belong to the Mon-Khmêr group—*Sak*, *Stieng*, *Bolaon*, *Annamese*, *Khamen-Boeun*, *Xong*, *Annam*, *Khmu*, and *Lamet*.

Notwithstanding our failure up till now to find any patent and direct social customs in common between the Khasis and the Palaungs, I am in hopes that we may yet discover some such affinities. Mr. Lewis, the Superintendent of Ethnography in Burma, states that there is no vestige of the matriarchal system among the Palaungs; but there is the folk-tale I have quoted above. In matters of succession, inheritance, &c., the Palaungs, Mr. Lewis says, profess to follow the Shans, whose customs in this regard have a Buddhistic basis. The Palaungs

I: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

There are also syntactical agreements. We may take it as finally proved by Dr. Grierson and Professor Kuhn that the Mon-Khmêr, Palaung, Wa, and Khasi languages are closely connected. In the section of the Monograph which deals with language some striking similarities between the languages of these tribes will be pointed out. We have not so far been able to discover social customs common to the Palaungs and the Khasis; this is probably due to the conversion of the Palaungs to Buddhism, the change in the religion of the people having possibly caused the abandonment of the primitive customs of the tribe. In a few years' time, if the progressive rate of conversions of Khasis to Christianity continues, probably the greater number of the Khasi social customs will have disappeared and others will have taken their place, so that it cannot be argued that because no manifest social customs can now be found common to the Khasis and the Palaungs, there is no connection between these two tribes. The strong linguistic affinity between these two peoples and the wild *Was* of Burma points to an intimate connection between all three in the past. As knowledge of the habits of the wild *Was* improves, it is quite possible that social customs of this tribe may be found to be held in common with the Khasis. With regard to social affinities it will be interesting to note the Palaung folk-tale of the origin of their Sawbwa, which is reproduced in Sir George Scott's Upper Burma Gazetteer. The Sawbwa, it is related, is descended from the Naga Princess Thusandi who lived in the *Nat* tank on the Mongsk hills and who laid three eggs, from one of which was born the ancestor of the Palaung Sawbwa. Here we see how the Palaung regards the egg, and it is noteworthy that the Khasis lay great stress on its potency in divination for the purposes of religious sacrifices, and that at death it is placed on the stomach of the deceased and is afterwards broken at the funeral pyre. Amongst some of the tribes of the Malay Archipelago also the *Gaji-Guru* or medicine-man "can see from the yolk of an egg, broken whilst sacramentally counting from one to seven, from what illness a man is suffering and what has caused it." Here we have an almost exactly parallel case to the Khasi custom of egg-breaking.

In the Palaung folk-tale above referred to the importance of

liGurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

of anything except iron or steel, the result being that the sword is most awkward to hold, and could never have been of much use as a weapon of offence.

The same spear is used for thrusting and casting. The spear is not decorated with wool or hair like the spears of the Naga tribes, but it is nevertheless a serviceable weapon, and would be formidable in the hand of a resolute man at close quarters. The length of the spear is about 6½ feet. The shaft is generally of bamboo, although sometimes of ordinary wood. The spear heads are forged in the local smithies.

The Khasi weapon *par excellence* is the bow. Although no "Robin Hoods," the Khasis are very fair archers, and they use the bow largely for hunting. The Khasi bow (*ka rynticĕ*) is of bamboo, and is about 5 feet in height. The longest bow in use is said to be about the height of a man, the average height amongst the Khasis being about about 5 feet 2 inches to 5 feet 4 inches. The bowstring is of split bamboo, the bamboos that are used being *u spit*, *u shken*, and *u siej-lieh*.

The arrows (*ki khnam*) are of two kinds: (a) the barbed-headed (*ki pliang*), and (b) the plain-headed (*sop*). Both are made out of bamboo. The first kind is used for hunting, the latter for archery matches only. Archery may be styled the Khasi national game. A description of Khasi archery will be found under the heading "Games." The feathers of the following birds are used for arrows:—Vultures, geese, cranes, cormorants, and hornbills. Arrow-heads are made of iron or steel, and are forged locally. The distance a Khasi arrow will carry, shot from the ordinary bow by a man of medium strength, is 150 to 180 yards. The Khasi shield is circular in shape, of hide, and studded with brass or silver. In former days shields of rhinoceros hide are said to have been used, but nowadays buffalo skin is used. The shields would stop an arrow or turn aside a spear or sword thrust. The present-day shield is used merely for purposes of display.

Before the advent of the British into the hills the Khasis are said to have been acquainted with the art of manufacturing gunpowder, which was prepared in the neighbourhood of Mawsanram, Kynchi, and Cherra. The gunpowder used to be

I: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

shield of Cherrapunji is used as a protection from rain. 293
Those of Maharam and Mawiang are each of a peculiar pattern. 352
Smaller shields are used as protections from the sun or merely for show, and there are specially small sizes for children. Then there are the different kinds of basket (*ki* 415
ákok) which are carried on the back, slung across the forehead 482
by a cane head-strap. These, again, are of different sizes. They are, however, always of the same conical shape, being round and broad-mouthed at the top and gradually tapering to a point at the bottom. A bamboo cover is used to protect the contents of the basket from rain. There is a special kind of basket made of cane or bamboo with a cover, which is used for carrying articles on a journey. These baskets, again, are of different sizes, the largest and best that the writer has seen being manufactured at Rambrai, in the south-western portion of the hills. 412
Paddy is husked in a wooden mortar by means of a heavy 415
wooden pestle. These are to be seen all over the hills. The 256
work of husking paddy is performed by the women. A bamboo sieve is sometimes used for sifting the husked rice, a winnowing fan being applied to separate the husk. The cleaned rice is exposed to the sun in a bamboo tray. Paddy is stored in a separate store-house in large circular bamboo receptacles. These hold sometimes as much as 30 maunds* of grain. Large baskets are also used for keeping paddy in. In 415
every Khasi house is to be found the net bag which is made 825
out of pineapple fibre, or of *u stein*, the Assamese *riha* 436
(Ilocharteria nivea). These bags are of two sizes, the larger one for keeping cowries in, the cowrie in former days having been used instead of current coin in these hills, the smaller for the ever necessary betel-nut. *Pán* leaves are kept in a bamboo tube, and tobacco leaves in a smaller one. Lime, for eating with betel-nut, is kept in a metal box, sometimes of silver, which is made in two separate parts held together by a chain. The box is called *ka shanam*, and 415
is used all over the hills. This box is also used for 787
divination purposes, one end of it being held in the hand, and the other, by means of the chain, being allowed to swing

* The maund is 82 lbs. 804

l: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

cartridge all the fish within a certain area are killed, none escape. When poisons are used, however, some fish are not affected by them, and others are only stupefied for the time being and afterwards recover.

FOOD.

The Khasi and Syntengs ordinarily take two meals a day, one in the early morning and the other in the evening, but labourers and others who have to work hard in the open take a midday meal as well, consisting of cold boiled rice wrapped in a leaf (*ša já-saŋ*), cakes (*ki kpu*) and a tuberous root (*u sohphlang*) which is eaten raw. They are fond of all kinds of meat, especially pork and beef, although some of the Syntengs, owing to Hindu influence, abstain from eating the latter. Unlike the neighbouring Naga, Garo and Kuki tribes, the Khasis abstain from the flesh of the dog. Both Bivar and Shadwell say the reason why the Khasis do not eat the flesh of the dog is because he is in a certain sense a sacred animal amongst them. There is a Khasi folk-tale relating how the dog came to be regarded as the friend of man. It is, however, quite possible that the Khasis may never have eaten the flesh of the dog from remote times, and it is nothing extraordinary that the Khasis should differ in a detail of diet from the neighbouring Thibeto-Burman tribes which are so dissimilar to them in many respects. The Khasis, except some of the Christian community and some of the people of the Mawkhar, do not use milk, butter, or ghee as articles of food. In this respect they do not differ from the Kacharis and Rabhas of the plains or the Garos of the hills. The Mongolian race in its millions as a rule does not use milk for food, although the Tibetans and some of the Turcoman tribes are exceptions. Before fowls or animals are killed for food, prayers must be said, and rice sprinkled on the body of the animal. The staple food of the Khasis is rice and dried fish. When rice cannot be obtained or is scarce, millet or Job's tears are used instead. The latter are boiled, and a sort of porridge is obtained, which is eaten either hot or cold according to fancy. Khasis eat the flesh of nearly all wild animals, they

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

challenge. From the records available of the military operations of the Khasis against the British, the former appear to have relied principally on bows and arrows, ambushes and surprises, when they fought against us at the time of our first occupation of the hills. During the Jaintia rebellion firearms were used, to some extent, by the Syntengs. The military records do not, however, disclose any peculiar battle customs as having been prevalent amongst those hill people then. Both Khasis and Syntengs seem to have fought much in the same manner as other savage hill-men have fought against a foe armed with superior weapons.

HUMAN SACRIFICES.

The Thlen Superstition.

There is a superstition among the Khasis concerning a *thlen*, a gigantic snake which requires to be appeased by the sacrifice of human victims, and for whose sake murders have even in fairly recent times been committed. The following account, the substance of which appeared in the *Assam Gazette*, in August, 1882, but to which considerable additions have been made, will illustrate this interesting superstition:—"The tradition is that there was once in a cave near Cherrapunji,* a gigantic snake, or *thlen*, who committed great havoc among men and animals. At last one man, bolder than his fellows, took with him a herd of goats, and set himself down by the cave, and offered them one by one to the *thlen*. By degrees the monster became friendly, and learnt to open his mouth at a word from the man, to receive the lump of flesh which was then thrown in. When confidence was thoroughly established, the man, acting under the advice of a god called *U Suid-noh*,† (who has as his abode a grove near Sohrarim),

* This cave is at Pomdalai, some five miles west of Cherrapunji, close to a great waterfall called *Noh Ka Likai*, i.e. the place where Ka Likai jumped down the precipice (for a full account of this story see Section V. of the monograph), where there is a large block of stone, with some cuts over it, known as *Daia Thlen*, i.e. the snake cutting (place).

† In another account it is said to have been U Suid-noh himself who did this.

l: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

having heated a lump of iron red hot in a furnace, induced the snake, at the usual signal, to open his mouth, and then threw in the red-hot lump, and so killed him. He proceeded to cut up the body, and sent pieces in every direction, with orders that the people were to eat them. Wherever the order was obeyed, the country became free of the *thlen*, but one small piece remained which no one would eat, and from this sprang a multitude of *thlens*, which infest the residents of Cherra and its neighbourhood. When a *thlen* takes up its abode in a family there is no means of getting rid of it, though it occasionally leaves of its own accord, and often follows family property that is given away or sold. The *thlen* attaches itself to property, and brings prosperity and wealth to the owners, but on the condition that it is supplied *with blood*. Its craving comes on at uncertain intervals, and manifests itself by sickness, by misadventure, or by increasing poverty befalling the family that owns the property. It can only be appeased by the murder of a human being." The murderer cuts off the tips of the hair of the victim with silver scissors, also the finger nails, and extracts from the nostril a little blood caught in a bamboo tube, and offers these to the *thlen*. The murderer, who is called *u nongshohnoh*, literally, "the beater," before he sets out on his unholy mission, drinks a special kind of liquor called, *ka 'iad tang-shi-snem* (literally, liquor which has been kept for a year). This liquor, it is thought, gives the murderer courage, and the power of selecting suitable victims for the *thlen*. The *nongshohnoh* then sets out armed with a short club, with which to slay the victim, hence his name *nongshohnoh*, i.e. one who beats; for it is forbidden to kill a victim on these occasions with any weapon made of iron, inasmuch as iron was the metal which proved fatal to the *thlen*. He also takes the pair of silver scissors above mentioned, a silver lancet to pierce the inside of the nostrils of the deceased, and a small bamboo or cylinder to receive the blood drawn therefrom. The *nongshohnoh* also provides himself with rice called "*u 'khaw tyndep*," i.e. rice mixed with turmeric after certain incantations have taken place. The murderer throws a little of this rice over his intended victim, the effect of which is to stupefy the

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

825 782 776

latter, who then falls an easy prey to the *nongshohnoh*. It is not, however, always possible to kill the victim outright for various reasons, and then the *nongshohnoh* resorts to the following subterfuge:—He cuts off a little of the hair, or the hem of the garment, of a victim, and offers these up to the *thlen*. The effect of cutting off the hair or the hem of the garment of a person by a *nongshohnoh*, to offer up to the *thlen*, is disastrous to the unfortunate victim, who soon falls ill, and gradually wastes away and dies. The *nongshohnoh* also sometimes contents himself with merely throwing stones at the victim, or with knocking at the door of his house at night, and then returns home, and, after invoking the *thlen*, informs the master that he has tried his best to secure him a prey, but has been unsuccessful. This is thought to appease the *thlen* for a time, but the demon does not remain inactive long, and soon manifests his displeasure for the failure of his keeper to supply him with human blood, by causing one of the latter's family to fall sick. The *thlen* has the power of reducing himself to the size of a thread, which renders it convenient for the *nong-ri thlen*, or *thlen* keeper, to place him for safety in an earthen pot, or in a basket which is kept in some secure place in the house. When the time for making an offering to the *thlen* comes, an hour is selected, generally at dead of night, costly cloths are spread on the floor of the house of the *thlen* keeper, all the doors are opened, and a brass plate is laid on the ground in which is deposited the blood, or the hair, or a piece of the cloth of the victim. All the family then gathers round, and an elderly member commences to beat a small drum, and invokes the *thlen*, saying, "*ko kni ko kpa* (oh, maternal uncle, father), come out, here is some food for you; we have done everything we could to satisfy you, and now we have been successful; give us thy blessing, that we may attain health and prosperity." The *thlen* then crawls out from its hiding-place and commences to expand, and when it has attained its full serpent shape, it comes near the plate and remains expectant. The spirit of the victim then appears, and stands on the plate, laughing. The *thlen* begins to swallow the figure, commencing at its feet, the victim laughing the while. By degrees the whole figure

1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

is disposed of by the boa constrictor. If the spirit be that of a person from whom the hair, or a piece of his or her cloth, has been cut, directly the *thlen* has swallowed the spirit, the person expires. Many families in these hills are known, or suspected, to be keepers of a *thlen*, and are dreaded or avoided in consequence. This superstition is deep-rooted amongst these people, and even nowadays, in places like Shillong or Cherrapunji, Khasis are afraid to walk alone after dark, for fear of being attacked by a *songskohnoh*. In order to drive away the *thlen* from a house or family all the money, ornaments, and property of that house or family must be thrown away, as is the case with persons possessed by the demon *Ka Taroh*, in the Jaintia Hills. None dare touch any of the property, for fear that the *thlen* should follow it. It is believed that a *thlen* can never enter the Siem's or chief's clan, or the Siem's house; it follows, therefore, that the property of the *thlen* keeper can be appropriated by the Siem. A Mohammedan servant, not long ago in Shillong, fell a victim to the charms of a Khasi girl, and went to live with her. He told the following story to one of his fellow-servants, which may be set down here to show that the *thlen* superstition is by no means dying out. In the course of his married life he came to know that the mother of his Khasi wife kept in the house what he called a *bhut* (devil). He asked his wife many, many times to allow him to see the *bhut*, but she was obdurate; however, after a long time, and after extracting many promises from him not to tell, she confided to him the secret, and took him to the corner of the house, and showed him a little box in which was coiled a tiny snake, like the hair spring of a watch. She passed her hands over it, and it grew in size, till at last it became a huge cobra, with hood erected. The husband, terrified, begged his wife to lay the spirit. She passed her hands down its body, and it gradually shrank within its box.

It may be stated that the greater number of the Khasis, especially in certain Siemships, viz. Cherra, Nongkrem, and Mylliem, still regard the *thlen*, and the persons who are thought to keep *thlens*, with the very greatest awe, and that they will not utter even the names of the latter for fear some ill may befall

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

them. The superstition is probably of very ancient origin, and it is possible that the Khasi sacrifices to the *thlen* demon may be connected with the primæval serpent-worship which characterized the Cambodians, which Forbes says was "undoubtedly the earliest religion of the Mons." But it must be remembered that snake-worship is of very ancient origin, not only in Further India, but also in the nearer peninsula, where the serpent race or Nagas, who may have given their name to the town of Nagpur, were long held in superstitious reverence. Mr. Gait, in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. i. of 1898, gives some account of the human sacrifices of the Jaintias or Syntengs. He writes as follows:—

"It appears that human sacrifices were offered annually on the *Sandhi* day in the month of Ashwin (Sukla paksha) at the sacred *pitha*, in the Faljur pargana. They were also occasionally offered at the shrine of Jainteswari, at Nijpat, i.e. at Jaintiapur, the capital of the country. As stated in the *Haft Iqlim* to have been the case in Koch Behar, so also in Jaintia, persons frequently voluntarily came forward as victims. This they generally did by appearing before the Raja on the last day of Shravan, and declaring that the goddess had called them. After due inquiry, if the would-be victim, or *Bhoge khaora*, were deemed suitable, it was customary for the Raja to present him with a golden anklet, and to give him permission to live as he chose, and to do whatever he pleased, compensation for any damage done by him being paid from the royal treasury. But this enjoyment of these privileges was very short. On the Navami day of the Durga Puja, the *Bhoge khaora*, after bathing and purifying himself, was dressed in new attire, daubed with red sandal-wood and vermilion, and bedecked with garlands. Thus arrayed, the victim sat on a raised dais in front of the goddess, and spent some time in meditation (*japa*), and in uttering *mantras*. Having done this, he made a sign with his finger, and the executioner, after uttering the usual sacrificial *mantras*, cut off his head, which was placed before the goddess on a golden plate. The lungs were cooked and eaten by such *Kandra Yogis* as were present, and it is said that the royal family partook of a small quantity of rice cooked in the blood of the victim. The ceremony was

1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

SECTION IV.

RELIGION.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF POPULAR BELIEFS.

THE Khasis have a vague belief in a God the Creator, *U Blei Nong-thaw*, although this deity, owing, no doubt, to the influences of the matriarchate, is frequently given the attribute of the feminine gender, cf., *Ka lei Synshar*. The Khasis cannot, however, be said to worship the Supreme God, although it is true that they sometimes invoke him when sacrificing and in times of trouble. The religion of the Khasis may be described as animism or spirit-worship, or rather, the propitiation of spirits both good and evil on certain occasions, principally in times of trouble. The propitiation of these spirits is carried out either by priests (*lyngdohs*), or by old men well versed in the arts of necromancy, and as the *lyngdoh* or wise man deals with good as well as evil spirits, and, as often as not, with the good spirits of ancestors, the propitiation of these spirits may be said to partake of the nature of Shamanism. A very prominent feature of the Khasi beliefs is the propitiation of ancestors; but this will be described separately. There is a vague belief amongst the Khasi of a future state. It is believed that the spirits of the dead, whose funeral ceremonies have been duly performed, go to the house or garden of God, where there are groves of betel-nut trees; hence the expression for the departed, *uba bam kwai ha iing u blei* (he who is eating betel-nut in God's house), the idea of supreme happiness to the Khasi being to eat betel-nut uninterruptedly. The spirits of those whose funeral ceremonies have not been duly performed are believed to take the forms of animals, birds, or

776 771 782 791 793 769 775 276 764 775 764 825

P. 105

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

insects, and to roam on this earth: but this idea of transmigration of souls has been probably borrowed from the Hindus. Bivar writes that although the ideas of a Godhead are not clearly grasped, yet a supreme creator is acknowledged, and that the following is the tradition relating to the creation of man. "God in the beginning having created man, placed him on the earth, but on returning to look at him, found he had been destroyed by the evil spirit. This happened a second time, whereupon the Deity created first a dog, then a man; and the dog, who kept watch, prevented the devil from destroying the man, and the work of the Deity was thus preserved." The Khasis, apparently, do not believe in punishment after death, at least, there is no idea of hell, although the spirits of those who have died under the ban of *sang* remain uneasy, being obliged to wander about the earth in different forms, as noted above. The spirits worshipped by the Khasis are many in number, those of the Syntengs being specially numerous. The particular spirit to be propitiated is ascertained by egg-breaking. The offering acceptable to the spirit is similarly ascertained and is then made. If the particular sacrifice does not produce the result desired, a fowl is sacrificed; the entrails being then examined, an augury is drawn, and the sacrifice begins afresh. As the process of egg-breaking is believed to be peculiar* to the Khasis amongst the Assam hill tribes, a separate description of it is given in the Appendix. It should be remarked that the Khasis never symbolize their gods by means of images, their worship being offered to the spirit only. The following are some of the principal spirits worshipped by the Khasis and Syntengs, omitting the spirits of deceased ancestors such as *Ka Iawebi*, *u Thawlang*, and *u Suidnia*, which will be described under the heading of ancestor-worship.

Ubi aulak—the god of the State, who is propitiated yearly by the sacrifice of a goat and a cock.

Ubi iatong—the god of water, used for drinking and cooking purposes. This god is similarly propitiated once a year, so that the water supply may remain pure.

* Sir Charles Lyall has pointed out that the Mikirs possess this custom; it is probably borrowed from the Khasis.

1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

restored by the due propitiation of the offended spirits. In order to ascertain which is the offended spirit, a system of divination by means of cowries, breaking eggs, or examining the entrails of animals and birds, was instituted. The Khasi method of obtaining auguries by examining the viscera of animals and birds may be compared with that of the Roman *haruspex*. Some description of these modes of divination has been given at the end of this chapter. The Khasi religion has been described by Bivar as "demon worship, or a jumble of enchantments muttered by priests who are sorcerers." But even a religion which is thus unflatteringly described is based on the cardinal doctrines of sin and sacrifice for sin. Tradition amongst the Khasis states that in the beginning (*mynnyngkong ka sngi*) there was no sin, heaven and earth were near each other, and man had direct intercourse with God. How man fell into sin is not stated, but it is certain that he did fall. Experts at "egg healing" never forget to repeat the formula "*nga briéw nga la pop*" (I man have sinned). The cock then appears as a mediator between God and man. The cock is styled "*u khún ka blei uba kit ryndang ba shah ryndang na ka bynta jong nga u briéw*," i.e. the son of god who lays down his neck (life) for me man. The use of the feminine *ka blei* is no doubt due to matriarchal influences. There is another prayer in which the Khasis say, "*ap jutang me u blei ieng raugbah me u briéw*" (oh god do not forget the covenant, arise oh man). The idea is that man has fallen into sins of omission and commission (*ka pop, ka lait ka let*) but that God is nevertheless expected to spare him, and to accept a substitute for him according to the covenant (*jutang*). By this covenant God is supposed to have accepted in exchange the cock as a substitute for man. How the cock came to occupy such an important position, tradition is vague and self-conflicting. The fact remains that the covenant of the cock is the foundation of the Khasi religion. It is of interest to mention that amongst the Ahoms the tradition is that Khunlung and Khunlái brought down from heaven the *kái-chún-mung*,* or pair of heavenly fowls, and that to this day the sacrifice of the

* In Ahom *kái* = fowl, *chán* = beautiful, *mung* = country. Therefore *Kái-chán-mung* = fowl of a beautiful country (heaven).

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

77/ fowl is considered by the Deodhais, or priest-soothsayers of the
825 Ahoms, a most important feature of the ancient Ahom ritual.
[71] But amongst the Ahoms there is the difference that auguries are obtained, not from the entrails, but by examining the legs of the fowls. The Ahoms are Siams belonging to the Tai branch, another great division of the Indo-Chinese group of the human race.

787 The covenant of the cock as thus explained shows the im-
825 portance of this sacrifice to the Khasis. The large intestine of a fowl has two pea-like protuberances, one close to the other. One is symbolically called *u blá* or god, and the other is styled *u briéw* or man, they are connected by a thin membrane. Directly the bird has been disembowelled the sacrificer throws a few grains of rice on the entrails and then watches their convulsive movements. If the portion of the entrail called *u blei* moves towards that portion which represents man, it is considered proof positive that the god has heard the prayer of the sacrificer, but if the movement proceeds in the opposite direction, then the reverse is the case and the omen is bad. If the entrails are full and healthy, having no spots (*brai*), or blood marks (*thung*), and if the membrane between the two protuberances has not been fractured, these are favourable signs. If the intestines are empty, wrinkled, or spotted, and the membrane mentioned above is fractured, these are bad signs. Auguries also are drawn by examining the livers, the lungs and spleens and gall bladders of pigs, goats, and cattle. If the liver of a pig is healthy and without spot, the augury is good; if the reverse, it is bad. The spleen must not be unduly distended, otherwise the omen is unfavourable and the gall bladder must not be over full. Invocations to deduce omens from the appearance of the entrails are quoted on page 11 of Col. Bivar's Report. From the first invocation quoted by him it appears that the method of drawing the augury from the fowl differs slightly in detail from that which has been described to me by certain Khasis, but both descriptions agree in the main, and the slight dissimilarity in detail may be due to the methods of obtaining auguries varying slightly in different localities. Divination by breaking eggs and by other means, although not strictly sacrifice with the Khasis, partakes

1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

of the nature of a religious ceremony. Such divinations are of almost every-day occurrence in a Khasi house, and always precede sacrifices. The Khasis, moreover, do nothing of what they consider to be of even the least importance without breaking eggs. When a Khasi builds a new house, or before he proceeds on a journey, he always breaks eggs to see whether the building or the journey will be lucky or not. The description of egg-breaking given by Shadwell in his account of the Khasis is not altogether correct. A detailed description of this method of divination will be found in Appendix C. The description can be depended upon, as it is the result of my personal observations of egg-breaking on several occasions. A board of the shape shown in the diagram (Appendix C) is placed on the ground, the egg-breakers' position being that indicated in the diagram. After the egg has been smeared with red earth, it is thrown violently down and the contents and the fragments of egg-shell fall on the board. Auguries are drawn from the positions of the fragments of shell on the board, and from the fact of their lying with the inner sides facing upwards or downwards. Another method of egg-breaking is for the diviner to wrap up the egg in a plantain leaf with the point uppermost, or merely to hold the egg in his hand in this position without wrapping it up, and then to press another egg down upon it. If the end of the egg so pressed breaks at once, this is a good sign, but if it remains unbroken, the egg has a god in it, and the omen is bad.

A common method of divination is by means of the *shanam*, or lime-case. The diviner holds the lime-case by the end of its chain, and addresses the god. He then asks the lime-case a question, and if it swings, this is supposed to be an answer in the affirmative; if it does not move, this is a negative reply. This seems to be a very simple trick, for the diviner can impart movement to the lime-case by means of the hand. A similar way of consulting the oracle is by the bow, which is held in the hand by the middle of the string. A simple method of divining is by means of cowries or grains of rice. The diviner plunges his hand into a bag or basket after asking the god a question. If the number of cowries or grains of rice comes out odd, the omen is good; if it comes out even, the reverse is the

000 that they may also get smallpox.

776 Every Khasi is desirous of wealth. There-
556 fore they sacrifice to the demoness of wealth, ka shur, whom they fear just as much as the Synteng fear the demoness ka taro, who likewise only allows the desired wealth to come to those who revere her.

776 But all evil taken together can be caused
782 by the demoness ka ron. She is the worst of all devils in the opinion of the Synteng. The Khasi sacrifice only to her and the devil u mahet inside the hut, and not as is otherwise customary out of doors (in the courtyard of the hut).

But the Khasi have the greatest fear of the
• [825] devil u thlen. He can be kept in the house by people in the form of a snake. Since he is only propitiated by human blood, it is necessary to find human sacrifices (ka 'langthoklieh). One cuts off the toenails and fingernails of the victims and these are brought with the blood of the murdered one during the night in a closed house as a sacrifice to the devil with prayers and exhortations. To get these human sacrifices, the thlen possessor must look for them with cunning or violence. Usually hired murderers are sent out, to whom one previously hands a quite special liquor 'iad-tang-snem (literally: lasts for a year). The Khasi believe that anyone who drinks this liquor is so influenced (enchanted) that he will really carry out the planned murder. When these murderers (nong-shoh-noh) are on their way or waiting in ambush to catch their victim for the thlen, they may not use any iron, because the thlen near the cave of Pomdalai near Cherrapunji was killed by a brave man named u suidnoh, when the thlen appeared there in the form of an enormous snake in order to swallow up people and animals. The victim is struck down with a stick which usually has a silver knob.